WHIRRAKEE

April 2008 Vol. 29 No. 3

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

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Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Bob Ruddick, Rod Orr, Jan Orr, Peter Ellis, Ben Goonan, Anthony Sheean, Rob Moors

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 29, No. 3, April 2008
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
I can hardly believe that quail is still being hunted in Victoria. In fact, the hunting season is about to begin, but not if Eris O'Brien has anything to do with it. Quail, like the endangered Plains Wanderer, occur in the Northern Plains Grasslands, the conservation of which is part of Elvyne Hogan's work. Elvyne's talk at the March general meeting showed that much work has been done and continues to be done, to preserve fragments of this delicate ecosystem. These grasslands are also of special significance to some of our club members, so the cautionary optimism about their future was very welcome.
As promised, this issue has the first instalment of Darren Green's series about the Lizards of the Bendigo District, although lack of room only allowed for Darren's Introduction – legless lizards and dragons will appear in the next issue.

Front Page Illustration – Photographer: Clive Fisher
Clive calls this the 'executed mugga ironbark'. He wrote about this tree (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon)* in the February *Whirrakee* and has recently found out that it has been cut down due to a housing development in the area.

Short notices

Upcoming speaker for the general meeting

On April 9, **Adam Muir** from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (Biodiversity section) is talking about 'Recognising threatened species habitat in assessments of native vegetation'.
Adam has supplied a summary of his talk:
Victoria's Native Vegetation Management - A Framework for Action, the Government policy released in 2002 is now firmly entrenched as a decision making tool. It is an incorporated document in the planning system and guides investment priorities for native vegetation protection and enhancement across the landscape. The Framework establishes threatened species habitat as an important criterion in establishing the conservation significance of a patch of native vegetation. But it is only relatively recently that an approach to apply this criterion has become available. This talk will explain the thinking behind the "best and rest" concept and, while highlighting the positive impact this approach can make, will also identify some of the practical and philosophical dilemmas that this throws up. This continues to be a developing area of policy implementation with opportunities for input from community organisations.

Biodiversity Law Workshop

This workshop will be presented by the Environment Defenders Office (EDO) and is sponsored by 'Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests'. The workshop is to help conservationists use the law to save and protect the bush and other natural ecosystems.

When: Wednesday 9 April, 10am-4pm
Where: Room 1, Continuing Education,
30 Templeton St., Castlemaine
Cost: suggested donation $20
($10 concession)
Bookings: phone Frank Panter 5470 5072
(spaces are limited)

The EDO asked for a local issue to feature in the workshop. We suggested Planning Minister Madden's announcement that he wouldn't allow Conservation Zones within Urban Boundaries in country areas (Bendigo Advertiser 11 Feb 08). He wants Urban Boundaries to only have Residential zones. Bendigo's and Castlemaine's Urban Boundaries contain a lot of bush, much of which would be destroyed in a Residential zone (which is for housing, rather than for saving bush, as VCAT keeps reiterating). These zoning issues will be discussed at a planning panel hearing in Bendigo later this year.

The EDO also says the workshop will help the community contribute to the State Government's Land & Biodiversity White Paper.

Thing (Event) of the night: Matthew Comer 'Just add Water - Interesting natural responses to a heavy downpour at Goornong'

by Sabine Wilkens

On the 21st December 2007, Goornong received 145mm of rain and some wetlands on what used to be Matthew's grandparent's farm, which had been dry for ten years, filled up immediately. Matthew was there to photograph the changes over the weeks following this event and the talk was a summary of the changes in the landscape. The force of the water was evident the day after the rain, as debris was pushed into high piles and some old trees had toppled over. Within a few days, fungi started to grow on the damp soil and egg masses of frogs appeared (Spotted Marsh Frog, Banjo Frog and Peron's Tree Frog). Many invertebrates had drowned in the deluge and after a while algae began to grow on their submerged corpses. Many birds were seen after the rain, probably taking advantage of the extra food supply (White-faced Heron, Black-fronted

Dotterel, Little Grebe and Grey Teal) and later, plants started to germinate in profusion, Spike Rush and Prattia were common, but so was Nardoo, Swainson Pea, Goodenia and Glycine.
After a month, the wetlands had dried up again. Many tadpoles would have hatched in time, but many more would have perished with the drying of the landscape.
There were many good comparison slides showing the same view some time apart and they were arranged in a very imaginative way. Matthew finished his account with a last slide that showed a glimpse of a swamp monster his grandmother had mentioned to him as a child. Sceptic members of the audience might have to wait another ten years to take a closer look at this creature.

Thank you, Matthew for this very inspiring presentation, which made me want to get my camera out and 'do something like that too'.

March General Meeting – Speaker Elvyne Hogan 'Northern Plains Grasslands: Going, or are we Gaining Ground?

Author: Sabine Wilkens

Elvyne Hogan is the regional manager of Trust for Nature and she has spoken to the Club previously about the activities her organisation undertakes. During this talk, Elvyne was concentrating on the Northern Plains Grassland and how they have fared in the last few years. Identifying such grasslands and their intrinsic value and then taking steps to preserve and improve them is part of Elvyne's work.

One of the first champions of the Northern Plains Grasslands was Paul Foreman, a botanist from the (then) Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). Paul was instrumental in establishing an appreciation for these grassland and setting in motion, action plans for their conservation. Paul organised many surveys of grassland remnants in the Northern Riverina Plains, and set up experimental plots near Terrick Terrick State Park, to study the effect of different management regimes. In 1996, Paul left and this work was taken up by Shirley Diez (Paul is now working for the Bush Heritage Fund). Currently Peter Morison (DSE) is in charge of this area. Many surveys had been undertaken by then, but many were still incomplete. In 1999 Rod Orr completed a survey for the Buloke Shire and Eris O'Brien also completed a survey for the Shire of Campaspe. Eris, a grassland farmer himself, has since become a tireless worker for grasslands, conducting surveys, educating residents and promoting sustainable farming of such grasslands..

Throughout this period of increasing interest, appreciation and knowledge about the ecology and value of these grasslands (late 1990s to early 2000's), many parcels of land were purchased by TfN, were covenanted or made part of the TfN rolling fund (temporary purchase, followed by protection and subsequent sale to sympathetic owners).

For example
Wishart's grassland
Davies Grassland (1200ha, added to Terrick Terrick State Park now a National Park)
Kotta (near Echuca, 80ha)
Kinypaniel near Korong Vale (210ha)
Glasson's Grassland near Echuca (170ha)
Korrak Korrak (other side of Korong, 246ha)
Budgerum near Quambatook (with a donation of a member of the BFNC)
Bails Grassland (first grassland covenanted, 174ha)

Mapping had begun by 2003 in the Patho Plains (northern grassland region) and the many fragments looked as if a network could be made from them, specifically to enable large connected pieces necessary for the survival of the endangered Plains Wanderer. A steering committee was established in 2004 to initiate a management network. If quality grassland was detected, letters were sent out to the landholders telling them of this and the protection guidelines applicable to these areas now.

Some surveys and mapping were also done in the Avoca Plains country

The second half the title of Elvyne's talk was 'are we gaining ground?' Elvyne left this for the audience to judge when presenting the summary table of protected grasslands:

	Patho Plains	Avoca Plains
DSE purchase	2860ha	
TfN	380ha	336ha
Revolving fund	80ha	40ha
Covenants	330 ha	

Some of this grassland (total area nearly 4000ha) is not the very best quality and some is strictly speaking more woodland, but overall, an impressive list. Much more work is needed and is presently going on, but overall the answer to Elvyne's question is a qualified 'yes'. Qualified, because even though much progress has been made, much is still to be done. The Arthur Rylah Institute and Monash University are currently involved in a number of studies. Some work is done by students from Monash, supported by the Holdsworth Foundation.

Many management questions about grazing regimes, for example, are yet to be answered. Eris O'Brien is passionate about all things grassland, but he particularly concerned about the continued legal hunting of quail. Any help in this area would be much appreciated (see letter below)

This was an optimistic talk, which did not leave the audience feeling that the fight for the grasslands is over and won, but that there is a chance – if the current level of work and passion for this special region of vegetation continues.

At the end, Bill Holsworth announced that there are plans afoot to produce a resource for people interested in this area. A CD-ROM, similar to that produced for the Box-Ironbark Forest, was mooted. This was greeted with much approval by the audience.
Glenise thanked Elvyne by saying this was just magic. Magic made by hard work.

Elvyne recently circulated this letter (slightly modified below) from Eris O'Brien with regards to quail hunting, which is considered a threat to Plains Wanderers as well as a nuisance to local farmers with shooters going on their land usually without permission. Even though the deadline for the below mentioned meeting is over, people might still be interested in this information:

Quail season has been approved again this season with no restrictions (as I expected), despite 10 years of drought and critically low numbers of Quail. The season is due to begin on 5th April
The VFF (Victorian Farmers Federation) are supposed to represent farmers views on the "Hunting Advisory Committee", which then guide the Environment Minister. Mr Alan Bowman is this VFF representative.
The Committee had a meeting on Thursday 6th March. What we need is for any members of the VFF or UDV, who care about the sustainability of the Quail population (whether for hunting or conservation), to contact their Local VFF representative and voice their concerns about the current low numbers of Quail, and recommend a season cancellation this year. These concerns need to be passed onto Alan Bowman. I think the primary concern is the threat to the sustainability of the Quail population and not "anti-hunting" per-se.
Duck hunting season has been cancelled in Victoria this season, because of reduced duck populations and reduced habitat due to the drought, however Quail seem to have been over-looked.
10 of the last 15 years have had well below average pasture cover across all Stubble Quail habitat in SE Australia, this includes 4 years when pasture cover was in the lowest percentile and classed "Critically Low". This combined with other land intensification pressures has decimated the native Quail population.

Please help,

Regards Eris

April Kamarooka Salinity Field Day

(see also page 10)

By Phil Dyson

A lot of us are tired of the spin we are now forced to participate in within the world of salinity management in Australia. It seems on so many fronts, that we are more concerned with marketing than good science. Many people have said this to me over the past few months.

A few short years ago, we had one of the best science based salinity programs in the world, now all of that seems to be lying behind us. Today we seem more concerned with survival than the excitement that comes from acquiring new knowledge. We need to show some leadership in turning this around.
If you agree with me, or even if you don't, maybe you should come and listen to the experiences of an exciting community based organisation dedicated to some good science in Central Victoria. The Northern United Forestry Group is holding a Field Day at Kamarooka on April 23, 2008 and it would be so good if you could come and see the things we have managed to achieve in just a few short years.

Join us as we tell you our story in rehabilitating saline land with trees, saltbush, native grasses and lucerne on the northern slopes of the Dividing Ranges in Victoria. See how a saline wasteland can be returned to productive agriculture, and understand how it is possible to begin to restore ecological function.

This is not more spin, instead it is the story of a community group that has managed to do so much in the face of such an extreme challenge. (Now go to page 10 for details)

Editor's note: The next article is the beginning of Darren Green's series about Lizards (followed by Snakes) of the Bendigo District. Consider this a taster... (to be continued in the next issue).

Lizards of the Bendigo District

by Darren Green

Introduction

Herpetology is the science devoted to the study of reptiles and amphibians, for some the natural history of these herps is an interesting and fascinating subject, often filled with myths, fear, and on occasion, danger. Observing reptiles and frogs is not everyone's idea of fun, however most people frequently encounter these animals in everyday life. Whether your reasons for reading this is to identify a lizard that a kookaburra just preyed upon, to simply know what's out in our surrounding bush, or perhaps a genuine interest in herpetology, I hope you will gain a great deal from this article and hope to imprint a message of conservation towards reptiles and frogs.

Often herps are seen basking on, or crossing roads, some live around our homes and gardens keeping the rodent or snail population down, others are misidentified and justifiably create panic in the observer. Searching for terrestrial reptiles typically involves looking under rocks, logs and other ground litter. On occasion, a simple bush walk during the warmer months of the year may yield a number of sightings. The focus of this article is on the lizards of the Bendigo district. Geckos are not covered in this article as they have been previously published in *Whirrakee*. If you want to read up on geckos, see the following *Whirrakee* references:

- Green, D. (2001) The Geckos of the Bendigo District Part One: Introduction To Geckos, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, *Whirrakee* 22(3):7-8.
- Green, D. (2001) The Geckos of the Bendigo District Part Two: Marbled Geckos *Christinus marmoratus*, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, *Whirrakee* 22(4):4-5.
- Green, D. (2001) The Geckos of the Bendigo District Part Three: Stone Gecko *Diplodactylus vittatus*, Bendigo

Field Naturalists Club, *Whirrakee* 22(4):4-5.

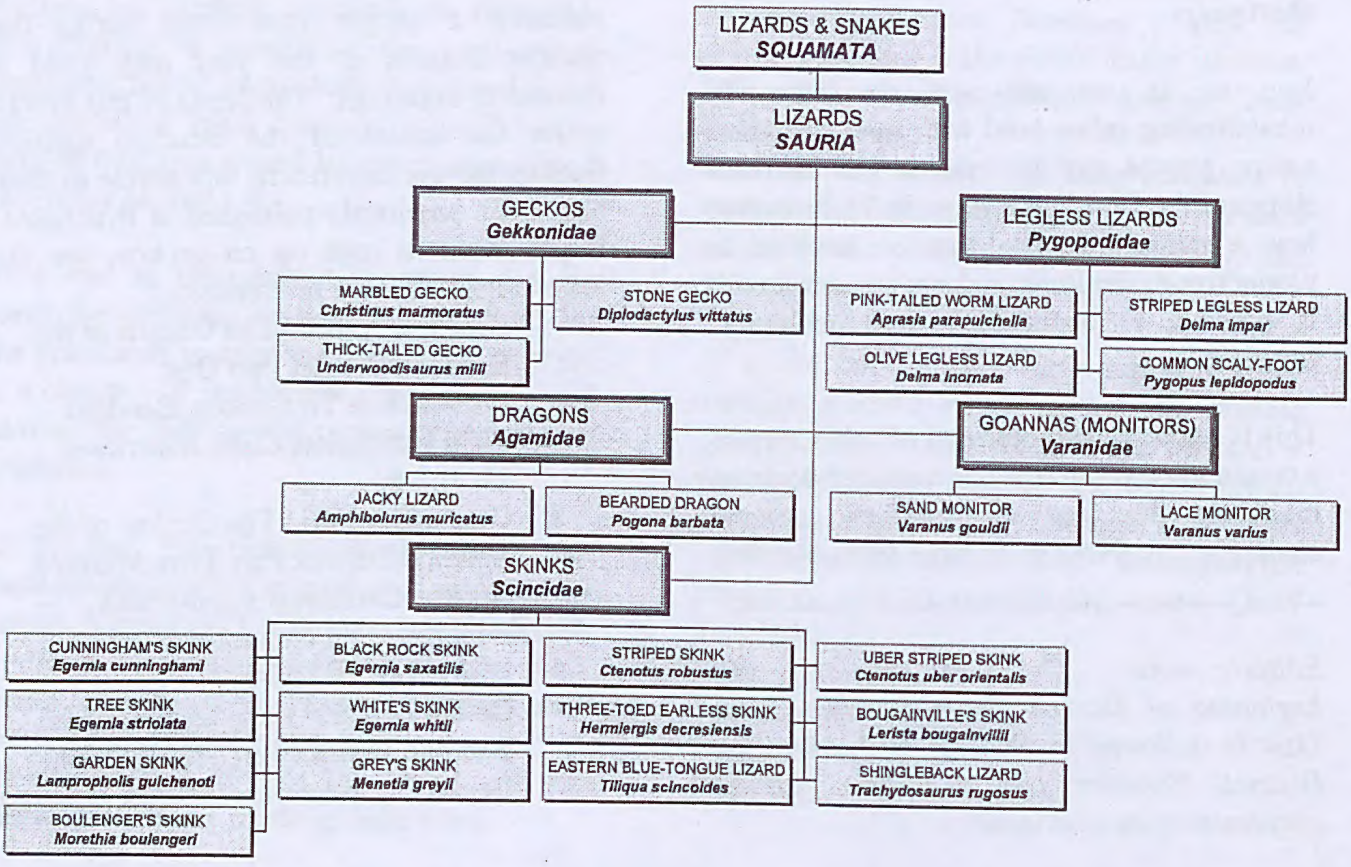
- Green, D. (2001) The Geckos of the Bendigo District Part Four: Thick-Tailed Gecko *Underwoodisaurus milii*, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, *Whirrakee* 22(5):5-6.
- Green, D. (2001) The Geckos of the Bendigo District Part Five: The Future of Bendigo's Geckos, Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, *Whirrakee* 22(5):5-6.

Brief descriptions are given here to distinguish between the Bendigo district lizards. For a fully comprehensive description see Cogger (2000). Length is often measured from the tip of the snout to the vent of the reptile, and is known as Snout-Vent Length (SVL), as some specimens may have missing, damaged or partly regrown tails, thus making a total length measurement overall inaccurate.

Geckos will occasionally turn up around houses to feed upon insects that are attracted to the lights. If conditions are right they will settle there and breed each season. Abandoned egg-shells may be encountered in the fernery, or juveniles may be seen scurrying across the walls in the torchlight. Likewise, skinks, and occasionally dragons, are attracted to human dwelling in search of a meal. The familiar Blue-tongue Lizard is a fine example of this, feeding upon snails and flowers. Perhaps a little unnoticed are the small 'drop-tail' skinks, which also tend to occupy garden beds or wood piles. These skinks avoid close contact, but may be watched to go about their routines in search of food, defending their territories or courting a mate. Their communal behaviour is enjoyable, or relaxing to observe in the comfort of your chair over a coffee.

As indicated, lizards not only have the benefit of companionship and tranquil effect on humans, but are also a natural pesticide. Lizards help keep insect and rodent populations down, reducing the amount of snails, slugs and mice in the garden for example, or even preying on flying and buzzing insects.

Below is an overview of the Bendigo lizards:



From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

* * * * * * *

THE BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
(1) December 2007

- French Flamingoes: a visit to the Camargue, a flat delta region of the Rhone River in southern France and a Ramsar listed site.

- ....Northern Subspecies of the Crested Shrike-tit: this species is thinly distributed across the Kimberley and Northern territory. Use of CD birdsong eventually enabled a sighting after much searching.

- The Bird People of St Kilda: this remote group of four small islands is part of Scotland's Outer Hebrides. The residents' lives depended to a large extent on the abundant bird life, particularly the Puffins. In 1930 the people were evacuated to the mainland.

(2) February 2008

- Pelagic Peril: severe damage to seabirds' beaks, especially albatrosses, is often caused by longline fishing activity in the Southern Ocean. Birds attracted to the bait get caught on the hooks.

- Fairy Pitta: a specimen of this vulnerable species native to Asia was recently seen for the first time in Derby, Western Australia.

- A Panoply of Penguins: the first of six articles to feature the fourteen species and their environments; this report deals with Emperor and King Penguins.

* * * * * * *

THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST (FNCV)
December 2007

- Intense fires promote uncommon post-fire ephemerals in Currawang (Acacia doratoxylon) dry scrubs of Little River Gorge, East Gippsland: 2003 wildfires provided the opportunity to compare effects of mild and intense fires on plant species. Less severe fire brought little change in understory abundance; intense fire led to dramatic increase in understory abundance and variety.

- A probable case of twins in the Short-beaked Echidna with observations on suckling of young after their emergence from the nursery burrow: juvenile echidnas found near a home in Gippsland allowed close observation and monitoring of breeding behaviour. Two young emerged from the nursery burrow eight days apart in December 2005. Progress was observed for several months as the young ventured further from burrow but continued to be fed by the mother.

* * * * * * *

Also received recently:

*Geelong Naturalist (Geelong FNC)

*The Ballarat Naturalist (Ballarat FNC)

*Castlemaine Naturalist (C'Maine FNC)

*Sun-Nat (Sunraysia FNC)

*Field Nats News (FNCV)

and a variety of other publications...

* * * * * * *

Northern United Forestry Group

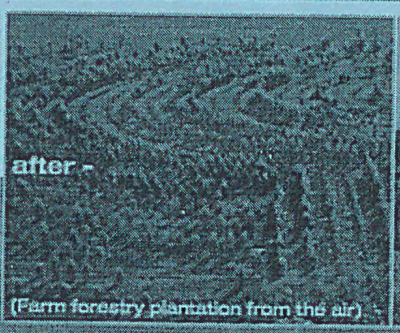
Field Day

Expert presentations
Farm forestry tour
Sap flow technology at work
Saltbush Seeder demonstration
BBQ lunch provided

Wednesday 23 April 2008 10 am - 2 pm

Saltbush, Lamb and Carbon

- increasing productivity from saline land



on the Hay family farm, Drummartin Road, Kamarooka

(Follow signs from Raywood-Elmore Road or Bendigo-Tennyson Road)

Guest Speakers

Phil Dyson, hydrogeologist
Salinity and the impacts of different revegetation treatments on the Kamarooka watertable. How the site responded to 132mm of rain in 24 hours, December 2007.

Andy Hay, farmer
Grazing management on revegetated saline land. How the whole farm's carrying capacity has been lifted 10%.

Will Dalton, RMCG
Economic evaluation of the revegetation of saline land at Kamarooka and the number of grazing days now available to the whole farm enterprise.

Dr Jacqui England, CSIRO Forest Biosciences
Commercial Environmental Forestry, reducing investment risk in forestry and revegetation, and measuring carbon in low-rainfall farm forestry plantations.

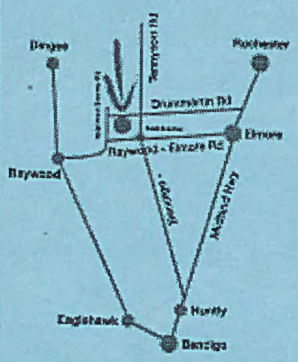
For information contact

Ian Rankin 0427 844 205
Lindsay Cail 0427 359 879

or visit **www.nufg.org.au**

For catering purposes please RSVP by Friday 11 April to Ian Rankin on 0427 844 205 or email ranx1@bigpond.com

RACV VICROADS Country Edition
Map 30 G 8-9



Northern United Forestry Group

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
National Landcare Programme

NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, April 9 **7.30pm**
Adam Muir will talk about 'Recognising threatened species habitat in assessments of native vegetation'. See page 3 for a summary.
Adam is the Manager of Flora & Fauna and Leader of the Biodiversity Team at the Department of Sustainability & Environment, Bendigo.

Wednesday, May 14 **7.30pm**
Stacey Bloomfield: 'Waterkeepers Australia'

Wednesday, June 11 **7.30pm**
Geoff Lay will talk about 'Fungi of the Box-Ironbark Forest'

Wednesday, July 9 **7.30pm**
Chris Tzaros (Birds Australia), bird topic to be determined…

Excursions

Contact Richard Goonan if you have any comments, questions or ideas for excursions in 2008 (ph 0423418815).

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.

Wednesday, April 23 **7.30pm**
Topic for discussion to be determined.

Regular Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30, the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179 or 5442 1813. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone but go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30 then the excursion is not on.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Australian Naturalists Network (ANN) Get-together 10-18 May 2008

Mary River Park, Northern Territory.
Expression of interest & deposit of $200 was due to NTFNC by 1/10/07.
Accommodation at Mary River Park was to be booked directly by end of October 07.
The **second notice** has been received. This includes an update on accommodation availability at Mary River Park (cabins are essentially full) plus lists of tour operators and natural history references.
Anne Bridley (54493479) has further details

Biodiversity Law Workshop

This workshop will be presented by the Environment Defenders Office (EDO) and is sponsored by 'Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forests'. The workshop is to help conservationists use the law to save and protect the bush and other natural ecosystems.

When: Wednesday 9 April, 10am-4pm
Where: Room 1, Continuing Education,
30 Templeton St., Castlemaine
Cost: suggested donation $20
($10 concession)
Bookings: phone Frank Panter 5470 5072
(spaces are limited)

Northern United Forestry Group Field Day

23rd April, 10am – 2pm.
See page 6 and page 10 for details.